

Comments for Senate Bill 646

Thursday, 26 March 2009

Madam Chair / Mr. Chairman and members of the committee;

My name is Daryl L Taylor, husband of Darlene Taylor. We reside in Naugatuck, New Haven County. We are here to support Senate Bill 646.

I would first like to thank Senator Hartley for the opportunity to speak in favor of this bill. On Tuesday 08 July 2008, my wife reported to Waterbury Superior Court for jury duty. Darlene had notified, via phone conversations with jury clerks, that she was the victim of a violent crime; in 1982 at the age of 23, she was raped at knife-point. As such, she was quite worried about being placed in a court proceeding that would force her to face that kind of situation again. Being fully aware that just the thought of the inside of a court room brought her to tears, I accompanied her to the Waterbury court as moral support. I had previously served on jury duty and felt I could walk her through the basic procedures to a fulfilling conclusion of serving her civic duty.

Upon checking in, I personally informed the court officer who collected her questionnaire that she was a victim of a violent crime and should be kept from consideration for selection to that type of case. This information was also spelled out clearly on the questionnaire although there was no specific place to put that information. Two jury pools were called. She was called for the third pool. I approached the court clerk who assembled this third pool and asked what type of case this was for. He claimed he couldn't tell me since I was not a juror. Understandable. I then informed him that my wife was a victim of a violent crime and he told me, "Don't worry." So, I watched my wife leave the Jury room assuming that she would be taken care of and the case would be a simple civil issue.

Ten minutes later, the door she was lead through opened and she came in crying hysterically and unable to speak other than to stutter the word "rape" over and over again. The clerk left before I could even say anything to him. We were left alone in the Jury Assembly room. I did my best to comfort her, but she was beyond any comforting. They callously placed her in a sexual assault case that was eerily similar to her own case all those years ago, down to the armed officers, full court room, and the age and race of the accused. All those visual triggers served to release suppressed emotions and long-buried wounds and she simply couldn't handle the flashbacks. Her own experiences of not only the crime itself but the ensuing court case were being relived in vivid detail right in that court room in front of all those strangers. After 15 or 20 minutes, I searched out any court personnel for assistance. The Court's Marshall was kind enough to summon a victim's advocate to talk to her. An hour later, we were allowed to leave.

Simply put, when one expects to fulfill one's civic duty by reporting and willingly taking part in the jury selection, one does not expect to be exposed to the most heinous memories of one's life. Through the use of even a minimal amount of common sense and diligence, this would have never even occurred. In this instance, any existing professional protocol was obviously overlooked, misconstrued, or simply ignored. In my wildest nightmare, I never would have expected that civil servants could be so callous as to fail to ascertain the background of prospective jurors. To some of us, any prospective life situation can be faced and handled in a head-on manner. However, to those who have been irreparably harmed by these horrendously violent crimes, there are some things that simply do not disappear and simply cannot be faced without assistance.

Please, give Senate Bill 646 all the professional, personal, and compassionate diligence you can muster. This is in no way an exemption of jury service for the victims of violent crimes, simply a needed protection to steer them away from being forced to relive the violence and degradation all over again at the hands of the court system.

Thank you.